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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NAIROBI 000065

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SUBJECT: Somalia - President Sharif Alleges TFG Ready to Build on Good Foundation in Second Year

REF: NAIROBI 33

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Patterson, Counselor for Somalia Affairs, State Department, Somalia Unit; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a January 14 meeting a confident TFG President Sheikh Sharif told Somalia Unit that the TFG had laid the foundation for a successful second year. Sharif cited changes to the security sector leadership, improvements in public messaging, and more successful regional outreach. Sharif said the TFG now needed to build on this foundation and to take advantage of visible splits within Hisbul Islam and al-Shabaab. Sharif said that he was tamping down tensions within the Parliament. He appeared to confirm reports that he was attempting to exert greater independence from Deputy Prime Minister Sharif Hassan. (Note: This was the first Embassy meeting with the President in six months in which Sharif Hassan was not/not in the room. End note.)

¶2. (C) Summary Continued: Sharif thanked the USG for its support of Radio Mogadishu and said that much of the fight in Somalia occurs in the realm of public opinion. Sharif was uncomfortable with the Kenyan plan for Juba and said that he wanted to consult with the USG about options. Sharif asked the USG to play a leading role in coordinating the international community and humorously signaled skepticism about the Italians. (Note: Sharif was scheduled to meet with Italian Foreign Minister Frattini later on January 14. End note.) Throughout the one-hour meeting, Sharif was relaxed and funny, but focused on the tasks at hand. End summary.

¶3. (C) In a January 14 meeting with Somalia Unit, TFG President Sharif said that his TFG had laid a good foundation during its first year. He cited changes to security leadership, improvements in public messaging, and accelerated regional outreach as evidence. Sharif credited the Somali people and support from the international community for his government's modest, first-year successes. He thought that recently-appointed Armed Forces Commander Gelle was better prepared than his predecessor to lead military efforts in Mogadishu. (Note: Following the meeting with Sharif, his Chief of Staff Abdulkareem Jama told us that Gelle had gained considerable respect among TFG forces because he sleeps and moves among the men and had immediately following his appointment made improvements to the camps in which they are based. End note.) Sharif said that the TFG needed armored vehicles so that the leadership can move more freely around Mogadishu. He cited the June assassination of well-respected former Security Minister Omar Hashi and the December 3 assassinations of three TFG ministers as evidence. (Note: We referred Sharif to the Italians, who we

understand plan to provide the TFG with at least one armored vehicle. End note.) Sharif said that the TFG also needed security advisors and assistance in consistently paying its forces.

¶4. (C) Sharif said the TFG was working to energize and mobilize the regions because Somalis were ready to confront al-Shabaab. He cited the pressure that al-Shabaab is under in Hiraan and Galgaduud regions, and added that the TFG needed to encourage all Somalis to fight for their communities. He noted that the TFG was supporting ASWJ/North Galgaduud and that the Prime Minister on January 14 had sent money to the group. Sharif said the TFG was working to send ammunition and medical supplies to Galgaduud but was encountering logistical problems.

¶5. (C) Sharif thought that providing alternatives for al-Shabaab's rank-and-file would speed reconciliation efforts. He thanked the USG for its support of a local school in Mogadishu and asked for additional USG support in providing this kind of assistance. Sharif thanked the USG for its support of Radio Mogadishu and said that much of the fight in Somalia occurs in the realm of public opinion. He requested USG support in setting up a television and short-wave radio network so that the TFG, unable to safely travel to all Somali regions, would have another medium through which to talk to the people.

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¶6. (C) Sharif said he was attempting to reduce tensions inside the Parliament. Deliberations and debates of the leadership's performance should happen inside the Parliament and, in an obvious reference to TFG MPs marooned in Nairobi, noted that those who "bounce from embassy to embassy" were only causing problems. Sharif said that he wants the TFGs to be strong but that he does not support people who are trying to operate outside the system and work against the common good.

¶7. (C) Sharif said that he told the Kenyans during a January 13 meeting that any plan for Juba should be part of a larger strategic plan for Somalia. The Kenyans told him that they are concerned that they do not have enough weapons for the ethnic Somali forces they are training. Sharif said the Kenyans told him that they have removed all Kenyans, refugees, and underage fighters from the training camps. (Note: We think this is unlikely. End note.)

¶8. (C) In addition to voicing concerns about the recruitment of refugees and ethnic Somali Kenyans for the planned Lower Juba offensive, we told Sharif that we feared enough political groundwork had not/not been laid in Lower Juba to ensure key clan buy in. A push on Kismayo could, therefore, easily backfire. We further stressed that we do not/not have confidence that the Kenyans understand Lower Juba politics well enough to work through these problems.

¶9. (C) Sharif agreed that our concerns were real and that our fears about clan dynamics legitimate. He was considering other possible options for the Kenyan-trained troops, and floated the idea of deploying them to Mogadishu. He would consult with the USG regarding options after the forces had completed their training.

¶10. (C) Sharif asked the USG to play a leading role in coordinating the international community and humorously signaled probable skepticism about the Italians by asking with a sly smile if the Ambassador had traveled to Mombasa because he was trying to avoid the Italian Foreign Minister who was currently in Nairobi.

(Note: After our meeting with Sharif, the Italian Special Envoy for Somalia indicated to us that Italy may be pursuing a strategy to undercut President Sharif's objectives with the Parliament. In addition, our contacts tell us that Italy is pushing reconciliation with Sheikh Dahir Aweys behind the scenes. End note.)

¶11. (C) Comment: Sharif appeared very confident and exhibited a more nuanced and strategic vision for Somalia than he has in past meetings. Although he was in Nairobi, Sharif Hassan was not at the President's side during today's encounter, which suggests that Sharif is less dependent on his one-time alter ego.

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